

Message Text

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R 151921Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4993

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 26960

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: FORMER PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC REFINES HIS
POSITION

REF: PARIS 26801

SUMMARY. ON SEPTEMBER 15 FORMER PRIME MINISTER
JACQUES CHIRAC MADE A STATEMENT THAT MOST OBSERVERS
CALLED A "HARD CLARIFICATION" OF HIS REMARKS TO THE
PRESS ON SEPTEMBER 13. COUCHED IN CLASSIC GAULLIST
TERMS CHIRAC'S STATEMENT CALLED FOR A UNIFICATION OF
THE MAJORITY AGAINST THE LEFT. HE UNQUALIFYINGLY
DISMISSED ANY HOPES OF WOOING MODERATE ELEMENTS OF THE
LEFT. HIS CHANCES OF EFFECTING A CHANGE IN MAJORITY
ELECTORAL STRATEGY, HOWEVER, REMAIN SLIGHT. MOST
OBSERVERS BELIEVE CHIRAC'S REMARKS REVEAL MORE HIS
PERSONAL AMBITION THAN ANYTHING ELSE. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A STATEMENT THAT SOME JOURNALISTS ARE CALLING
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REMINISCENT OF DE GAULLE'S FAMOUS "APPEL DU 18 JUIN,"

FORMER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC, FOR THE SECOND TIME IN 48 HOURS, MADE AN OFFICIAL DECLARATION TO THE PRESS WITH SUCH CLASSIC GAULLIST TERMS AS "ENGAGER UN COMBAT DECISIF", "LA SAUVEGARDE DE NOS LIBERTES ET LE FONDEMENT MEME DE NOTRE DIGNITE" AND "C'EST L'HEURE DU RASSEMBLEMENT ET DU RENOUVEAU." CHIRAC EFFECTED A "HARD CLARIFICATION" OF HIS SEPTEMBER 13 STATEMENT. HE DECLARED THAT EVERY FRENCHMAN SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE FACT THAT "FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS ARE GOING TO DECIDE THE FATE OF FRENCH SOCIETY PERHAPS FOR MANY YEARS TO COME." HE SAID THAT THE PERMANENCE OF FRENCH INSTITUTIONS, THE SAFEGUARDING OF...LIBERTIES AND THE VERY FOUNDATION OF (FRENCH) DIGNITY WAS THE REAL ISSUE. HOWEVER, THE SENTENCE THAT MADE EVERYONE SIT UP, AND HAS PARIS POLITICAL CIRCLES BUZZING, IS THE FOLLOWING: "EVERY FRENCHMAN SHOULD KNOW THAT IT IS VAIN TO HOPE FOR A DIVISION AMONG OUR ADVERSARIES." HE SAID THAT HE RENOUNCED HIS FUNCTION AS PRIME MINISTER IN "FULL LUCIDITY AND FULL CLARITY" IN ORDER TO DEDICATE HIMSELF TO A POLITICAL BATTLE. "I INVITE YOU", HE CONCLUDED, "TO DEFEND WITH DETERMINATION THE VALUES AND THE VIRTUES THAT ARE THE PRIDE OF FRANCE AND WHICH CONSTITUTE THE GRANDEUR OF ITS PEOPLE....NOW IT IS MY TURN TO TELL YOU THAT THIS IS THE HOUR OF REASSEMBLY AND RENEWAL (RASSEMBLEMENT ET RENOUVEAU)."

2. THERE ARE MORE OR LESS TWO INTERPRETATIONS AS TO WHAT MOTIVATED CHIRAC TO COME OUT WITH REMARKS SO PATENTLY EMBARRASSING TO GISCARD D'ESTAING. BY FAR THE MAJORITY OF COMMENTATORS THINK CHIRAC, THE EXPLOSIVE POLITICAL ANIMAL, IS TOO IMPATIENT TO AWAIT WHAT COULD BE A MORE FORTUITOUS TIME TO JUMP BACK INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA WITH BOTH FEET, AND HAS DECIDED TO GET THE BALL ROLLING IN HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THE ELYSEE RIGHT NOW. THIS CAMPAIGN, AS CHIRAC PRESUMABLY SEES IT, COULD TAKE TWO TACKS: EITHER HIS DOGMATIC DISMISSAL OF ANY POSSIBILITY OF WOONG THE MODERATE LEFT WILL SOMEHOW WIN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF MOST OF THE CURRENT MAJORITY -- THEREBY MAKING CHIRAC OUT TO BE A MORE ASTUTE ANALYST OF THE POLITICAL SCENE THAN VGE EVEN BEFORE THE FORTH-

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COMING ELECTIONS -- OR THE MAJORITY WILL LOSE THESE IMPORTANT MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS -- THEREBY MAKING PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT CHIRAC WAS RIGHT ALL ALONG AND EASING HIS PATH TO THE PRESIDENCY. THE SECOND MAJOR INTERPRETATION OF CHIRAC'S STATEMENT, FAR LESS ENCOMPASSING THAN THE FIRST, IS THAT CHIRAC IS MERELY PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE FORTHCOMING UDR PARLIAMENTARY ASSIZES AT THE END OF THIS MONTH, WHICH ACCORDING TO

SOME REPORTS, HE PLANS TO ATTEND AND WHERE HE WOULD PRESUMABLY HOPE TO WIN AS MUCH APPEAL FROM HIS PARTY AS HE DID AT THE FAMOUS NICE ASSIZES IN JUNE 1975.

3. WHATEVER THE CASE, THE SITUATION IN WHICH THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER TODAY FINDS HIMSELF IS UNIQUE IN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 26960

THE FIFTH REPUBLIC. FORMER PRIME MINISTERS SUCH AS CHABAN-DELMAS AND GEORGES POMPIDOU, WHEN THEY LEFT MATIGNON, MERELY REJOINED THE RANKS OF PARTY MILITANTS. IT WAS UNTHINKABLE WITH A GAULLIST PRESIDENT AND A GAULLIST PRIME MINISTER THAT A FORMER GAULLIST PRIME MINISTER SHOULD TAKE OPEN OPPOSITION TO INTERNAL POLITICAL STRATEGY. UNLIKE THE FORMER TWO, HOWEVER, CHIRAC HAS HIMSELF A SOLID POLITICAL MACHINE, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE WIDELY CONFLICTING ESTIMATES EVEN FROM WITHIN THE UDR ITSELF AS TO HOW MANY MILITANTS REALLY BACK THE

FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND HOW MANY ONLY GIVE LIP SERVICE TO HIS PARTICULAR BRAND OF GAULLISM. (AT THIS POINT IT IS BEST TO REMEMBER THE EASE WITH WHICH ONE OF CHIRAC'S GOLDEN-HAIRED BOYS, ANTOINE RUFFENACHT, ACCEPTED THE POST OF STATE SECRETARY ATTACHED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE IN THE NEW BARRE CABINET). SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL YVES GUENA, WHO ONLY ONE DAY AFTER CHIRAC'S FIRST STATEMENT STATED CONFIDENTIAL

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FLATLY THAT CHIRAC AND THE PARTY SAW EYE TO EYE (PARA 3 REFTEL), MAY HAVE A DIFFICULT TASK AT THE ROCAMADOUR ASSIZES KEEPING THE CHIRAC ELEMENT OF THE PARTY FROM MAKING WAVES. POST IS CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT THE UDR WILL REMAIN FIRMLY IN THE MAJORITY AND THAT CHIRAC, REALIZING THAT HE HAS MOVED TOO SOON AND TOO FAST, WILL TEMPER HIS FUTURE TACTICS AND MAKE THEM MORE IN ACCORD WITH MAJORITY POLICY.

4. THERE REMAINS, HOWEVER, THE OUTSIDE POSSIBILITY THAT CHIRAC HAS CAST ALL CONSIDERATIONS BUT HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE ASIDE AND THAT, EITHER BY SPLITTING OFF HIS WING OF THE UDR FROM THE CURRENT MAJORITY OR BY CAUSING INTERNAL STRIFE IN SOME OTHER FORM, HE WILL PROVOKE A CRISIS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY THAT WILL IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER CATAPULT HIM INTO THE FOREFRONT OF FRENCH POLITICS. ADMITTEDLY HE HAS MANY POWERFUL FRIENDS. JACQUES HERSANT, WHO OWNS "FIGARO" AND "FRANCE-SOIR" AMONG OTHER NEWSPAPERS, COULD CONCEIVABLY TAKE UP CHIRAC'S CAUSE IN ONE OF HIS MANY PUBLICATIONS. HE HAS A FIRM POLITICAL BASE IN HIS NATIVE CORREZE AND TO MANY, HE IS THE STRONG MAN AGAINST DISORDER. EVEN TAKING THIS INTO CONSIDERATION, HOWEVER, HIS CHANCES FOR SUCCESS, IN THE CURRENT SITUATION, SEEM LIMITED. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING HAS REITERATED TIME AND AGAIN HIS DETERMINATION NOT TO HOLD PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BEFORE 1978 WHEN THEY ARE REGULARLY SCHEDULED TO OCCUR. HE HAS FURTHER REITERATED HIS INTENTION OF REMAINING IN THE ELYSEE NO MATTER WHO SHOULD WIN LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS AND FINALLY, THERE IS NOT THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL DO AN ABOUT-FACE AND REVERT TO SOME KIND OF BLOCKHAUS GAULLISM. AS STATED ABOVE, CHIRAC, SEEING HIS PLANS GO AWRY, MIGHT OPT FOR MODERATING HIS POSITION IN ORDER THAT IT BE MORE IN ACCORD WITH MAJORITY POLICY. THE TRUTH WILL BE CLEARLY REVEALED IN THE RECEPTION HIS "APPEL" GETS IN ROCAMADOUR AT THE END OF THE MONTH, WHETHER OR NOT HE IS HIMSELF PRESENT.

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